United Nations A/59/132

General Assembly

Distr.: General
6 July 2004
English
Original: Chinese/English/French/
Spanish

Fifty-ninth session
Item 67 (k) of the preliminary list*
Improving the effectiveness of the methods of work of the First Committee

Improving the effectiveness of the methods of work of the First Committee

Report of the Secretary-General

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* A/59/50 and Corr.1, 2 and 3.

04-41801 (E) 100804 100804

I. Introduction

1. On 8 December 2003, the General Assembly adopted resolution 58/41, in which it requested the Secretary-General, within existing resources to seek the views of Member States on the issue of improving the effectiveness of the methods of work of the First Committee and to prepare a report compiling and organizing the views of Member States on appropriate options. The present report is submitted pursuant to that request and is based on information received from States.

2. In this connection, a note verbale dated 12 March 2004 was sent to States requesting their views. The replies received are reproduced in section II below. Any further replies received will be issued as addendums to the present report.

II. Replies received from States

A. Argentina

[Original: Spanish]
[31 March 2004]

1. The issue of improving the effectiveness of the methods of work of the First Committee should be considered in the wider context of the revitalization of the General Assembly and of the working group set up for the purpose.

2. In view of the new international situation, Member States must not bring the status quo into the disarmament and non-proliferation discussions.

3. As responsible participants in the international community, Member States must take a pragmatic approach that will enable them to meet new challenges.

4. The challenge of terrorism, as a new and real threat on the international scene, adds a new dimension to disarmament, non-proliferation and arms control.

5. The new international situation calls for effective multilateralism focusing on specific issues. It is therefore essential, in order to achieve international security, that existing international legal instruments be strictly observed and strengthened and that supplementary instruments be elaborated. The rule of law and transparency are without question the foundation of democratic practices at the international level.

6. In the context of the work of the Main Committees as a whole, the First Committee has been operating efficiently and meeting for just five weeks. It has also been acknowledged that the Committee has not made full use of the facilities and services available to it.

7. Argentina believes that the difficulties encountered by the First Committee are not so much a matter of methodological approach as of political approach, owing to the sensitive nature of the issues discussed. No methodology, no matter how carefully crafted, can replace political will.

8. Only through frank dialogue will it be possible to generate the necessary political will for reform or adjustment of institutions to the new circumstances.

9. The following changes in the Committee's methods of work could help to promote a climate conducive to dialogue:

I. Appointment of the officers of the Committee

10. The Chairman and the other officers of the Committee should be appointed a year in advance so that the necessary consultations may be held and the new officers can follow First Committee matters with the outgoing Chairman's support.

II. Length of sessions

11. The First Committee should continue to meet for five weeks, since many delegations must also cover the work of other Main Committees.

12. Too great a reduction in the schedule of meetings could be prejudicial to dialogue and the right of all delegations to follow the Committee's work.

III. Organization of work

13. One meeting should be set aside for organization of work, since the Chairman, with the help of the other officers of the Committee, will have held the necessary consultations before the Committee meets.

14. Five meetings should be set aside for the general debate, on the assumption that each Member State may speak for a maximum of five minutes and that copies of the full statement can be circulated.

15. Furthermore, rule 110 of the rules of procedure of the General Assembly should be applied; the rule provides that "congratulations to the officers of a Main Committee shall not be expressed except by the Chairman of the previous session — or, in his absence, by a member of his delegation — after all the officers of the Committee have been elected".

16. Twelve meetings should be set aside for the structured debate, and the current method of clustering items should be restructured as follows:

(a) Cluster 1, on weapons of mass destruction, would contain old cluster 1, on nuclear weapons, and 2, on other weapons of mass destruction;

(b) Cluster 2, on conventional weapons, would be the same as old cluster 4;

(c) Cluster 3, on international security and other related matters of disarmament and international security, would cover old cluster 3, on outer space (disarmament aspects); cluster 5, on regional disarmament and security; cluster 6, on confidence-building measures, including transparency in armaments; cluster 9, on matters relating to disarmament and international security; and cluster 10, on international security;

(d) Cluster 4, on other disarmament measures, would be the same as old cluster 8;

(e) Cluster 5, on disarmament machinery, would be the same as old cluster 7.

17. Three meetings should be set aside for each of clusters 1, 2 and 3, and two meetings should be set aside for cluster 4 and one meeting for cluster 5.

18. In addition to the introduction of draft resolutions, the structured debate could be used for follow-up of the implementation of the resolutions adopted in previous years, and for hearing statements by the Secretariat on subjects on which reports have been requested from the Secretary-General, and by the directors of the regional centres for disarmament.

19. A statement could also be made by the President of the Conference on Disarmament in office during the period prior to the current session of the General Assembly, as well as by, for example the chairmen of meetings held in the period in question, the Chairman of the Advisory Board on Disarmament Matters, the Chairmen of the groups of governmental experts, and the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research.

20. Lastly, upon completion of consideration of each cluster, the Chairman of the First Committee could make a general statement to the press that would help to show the public at large the work done by the Committee.

21. The decision-making process should be completed in seven meetings, no general statements would be made at the beginning of the decision-making process on each cluster, and explanations of vote before or after a decision would be limited to a maximum of three minutes.

IV. Agenda

22. This is probably the trickiest question of all, owing to the variety of reasons for which a Member States submits a draft resolution.

23. There can therefore be no requirement that items be eliminated simply on the basis of how long they have been on the agenda, or because they have been repeated year after year and adopted by consensus.

24. Thus strengthened, the structured debate would ensure that the views and security needs of each Member State are made known and that texts more in keeping with the situations to be dealt with are elaborated.

25. The First Committee should endeavour to take a goal-oriented approach, not an agenda-oriented one. As the goals set in the resolutions adopted are attained, the corresponding items should be removed from the agenda, and others should simultaneously be added, in a spontaneous, natural process.

26. The biennualization or triennualization of resolutions should be considered on a case-by-case basis. For example, if a group of governmental experts is set up, no resolution should be drafted until the group has completed consideration of the item. The proposed statements by the relevant working-group chairman in the course of the structured debate would permit follow-up of the item by the First Committee, without it being necessary to adopt a resolution that cannot contribute anything new for the time being.

27. Furthermore, the principal sponsors of draft resolutions on one and the same topic could hold consultations to determine whether it would be possible to elaborate a single text. For example, there could be a single resolution on regional centres for disarmament, with specific chapters on each centre focusing on the work carried out by each centre since the last session of the General Assembly, and giving the centres guidance as to the work to be carried out in the forthcoming period. The proposal that the directors of the centres should present their work during the

structured debate would make them more visible, while at the same time requiring them to rise to the challenge of meeting Member States' expectations.

28. Moreover, the principal sponsors of a draft resolution should be encouraged, if they have not already done so, to set medium- and long-term objectives to streamline requests for reports from the Secretary-General. For example, if the establishment of a group of experts is to be requested within two years, a start should be made by asking the Secretary-General to request observations from Member States on the matter, which would thus have time to submit their observations prior to the establishment of the group. Once the working group in question has began its work, the First Committee should refrain from taking any action on any draft resolution, while continuing to monitor the group's work closely in the structured debate. Such an approach would automatically reduce the number of reports.

V. Follow-up of resolutions adopted

29. Since the officers of the Committee would be appointed in advance, consideration could be given not only to preparing for the First Committee's work at the next General Assembly session, but also to making a contribution to the follow-up of resolutions adopted. For that purpose it would also be possible to look to the outgoing Chairman for assistance in ensuring a smooth transition.

30. In that connection, the principal sponsors of the resolutions adopted could hold informal meetings for the exchange of information and/or views, as well as seminars with the participation of members of civil society, with a view to enriching the discussion of the item in question.

31. Although such activities could be carried out during the entire period from one session to the next, the occasion of the substantive sessions of the Disarmament Commission would be an appropriate time.

32. A more ambitious alternative would be to include the item "Follow-up of the resolutions of the First Committee of the United Nations General Assembly" in the agenda of the Disarmament Commission, as a third permanent item, which would be useful in that it would complement the work of both bodies.

B. China

[Original: Chinese/English]
[28 June 2004]

1. The reform of the First Committee of the United Nations General Assembly, an integral part of the United Nations, cannot deviate from and should be carried out in line with the reform of the United Nations as a whole.

2. By performing their respective functions and working cooperatively, the First Committee, the Conference on Disarmament and the United Nations Disarmament Commission form an inherent working logic and constitute the basic framework of multilateral disarmament. The reform of the First Committee should be conducive to coordinating and strengthening the relationships among the above-mentioned three mechanisms.

3. The reform and readjustment of the First Committee should not change its basic nature as the most representative international forum on security and disarmament, nor undermine each Member State's right to express views on international security and disarmament issues.

4. It is reasonable to reduce the length of First Committee meetings, shorten the time of the general debate and allocate time for specific discussions on certain agenda items. At the same time, the focal points of meetings should be highlighted, sufficient time should be provided for discussion on topical issues, and the right of each party to express views on issues concerned on an equal footing should be guaranteed.

5. For the purpose of enhancing the efficiency of the First Committee, it is very necessary properly to compress and cluster some resolutions to make them more pertinent. Imposing upper limits on the number of resolutions is neither practical nor feasible. Moreover, doing so cannot be regarded as a democratic approach.

6. The First Committee should reflect the concerns of all countries. Therefore, limiting the scope of its agenda is not advisable. As to defining the main theme of the First Committee beforehand, for practical reasons, currently it is feasible to deal with different agenda items in different ways. Some agenda items could be addressed every two or three years.

7. With regard to the role of the Chairman, the idea of electing the Chairman and Bureau in advance with a view to enhancing coordination deserves consideration.

C. Cuba

[Original: Spanish]
[21 May 2004]

1. Cuba supports the position stated on this topic by the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries.

2. The role of the First Committee, as part of the multilateral disarmament machinery, is of great importance at a time when military expenditure is increasing in the world, chiefly as a result of the staggering increase in the one superpower's military spending, nuclear weapons are continuing to be developed and being given a greater role in the security doctrines of a number of States, and attempts are being made to impose unacceptable pre-emptive war approaches, which are clearly in violation of the Charter of the United Nations and the fundamental principles of international law.

3. Proposals to improve the effectiveness of the methods of work of the First Committee cannot be implemented in isolation from the process of revitalizing the General Assembly and reforming the United Nations as a whole, including the Security Council.

4. Matters relating to the methods of work of the First Committee must therefore be considered in the overall context of the open-ended consultations on the revitalization of the General Assembly that are being held at the plenary level, under the leadership of the President of the General Assembly, on the basis of resolution 58/126, adopted on 19 December 2003.

5. Cuba believes that it is necessary to embark on a comprehensive reform process covering substantive issues relating to multilateral disarmament machinery, including the implementation of the resolutions and decisions of the First Committee, the resumption of substantive work by the Conference on Disarmament and the revitalization of the Disarmament Commission.

6. The reform of the United Nations, including the work of its Main Committees, as in the case of the First Committee, should be approached with care and in a balanced fashion, since it is a process with major implications for all Member States.

7. Cuba believes that the chief difficulties confronting the First Committee are not attributable primarily to the effectiveness or otherwise of its methods of work but, rather, to political considerations, particularly the lack of political will shown by some States to move forward with respect to matters of key importance for international peace and security, such as the issue of nuclear disarmament.

8. As long as some States continue to show no real political will, no change in the Committee's methods of work will result in progress on the items in question.

9. Action with a view to changing the First Committee's method of work is not new. The Committee has undergone major change in the past, with a view to improving its effectiveness as much as possible. One result of the earlier processes was that the Committee's session was reduced to just five weeks.

10. Although the First Committee considers items of great importance and adopts the most resolutions and decisions each year, it is the Committee that meets for the shortest period of time.

11. In Cuba's view, further reducing the length of time for which the First Committee meets would seriously reduce its effectiveness. It would be unacceptable for it to meet for less than five weeks.

12. Consideration of some resolutions on a biennial or triennial basis could be a viable option, and has in fact shown itself to be a viable option, in particular cases. However, ultimately it is the sponsors of each resolution who should determine the periodicity that they consider most appropriate for consideration of their draft. It would be unacceptable to assign a particular periodicity to a resolution or decision without the prior consent of its sponsor or sponsors.

13. Cuba believes that a flexible approach could be taken with respect to periodicity. A resolution that has been considered on an annual basis could, following a decision by its sponsors, be considered as circumstances dictate or for an indefinite period, with a periodicity of 2, 3 or more years. The opposite could also apply. A resolution that may have been considered on a biennial or triennial basis could be considered annually, if its sponsors considered it desirable.

14. Cuba is not in favour of the proposal that items under which no resolutions have been submitted for a given number of years, such as, for example, 2, 3 or 4 years, should be removed from the Committee's programme of work. Whether or not resolutions are submitted under a particular item is determined by various factors, many of them resulting from particular circumstances and they are not necessarily attributable to how relevant the item is.

15. The process of deciding whether or not a given item or items should remain on the Committee's agenda can thus not be directly determined by whether or not resolutions have been submitted under a given item during a particular period of time. Committees' programmes of work must appropriately reflect the interests of all States and not just those of some States.

16. Furthermore, Cuba does not support the proposal that the number of draft resolutions and decisions submitted each year should be limited. Any numerical limit set will be artificial and will infringe the right of any State to submit any drafts it considers necessary in the context of the General Assembly. In addition, setting such a limit would also constitute a violation of the rules of procedure of the General Assembly.

17. In recent years, there has been a growing tendency in the First Committee to set up expert groups to prepare studies on various extremely important issues relating to disarmament, non-proliferation and arms control.

18. Much of the work carried out by such expert groups has been useful. At the same time, because of its small size, no expert group can be sufficiently representative of the United Nations membership at large.

19. It is therefore essential that once an expert group has submitted its report, all Member States should have the necessary time to consider the report properly and prepare their comments on it. It is then necessary to embark on substantive discussion of the experts' report and recommendations, with the participation of interested States. In the light of the outcome of that process, it will be decided what action should be taken.

20. Expert groups can in no way play the role of Member States.

21. The amount of time that delegations currently have from the conclusion of the First Committee's general debate to the deadline for submitting draft resolutions is insufficient. This means that often, while the general debate and discussion of individual items are taking place, outside the conference room important consultation and negotiation processes on particular draft resolutions are taking place.

22. In addition to having a negative impact on small delegations, this state of affairs detracts from the general debate, which is meant to be an extremely important political aspect of the Committee's work.

23. The amount of time set aside for real negotiations on draft resolutions is not adequate either. Cuba is in favour of setting aside more time for holding informal consultations, in which all interested delegations may participate, on draft resolutions already submitted or yet to be submitted. This is particularly important in the case of texts incorporating major substantive changes compared with the previous year and new texts.

24. The officers of the Committee should be appointed soon enough before the Committee begins its work to allow them to prepare appropriately for the forthcoming session; to hold informal consultations with delegations on what their main expectations are for the forthcoming session; to hear delegations' views on how resolutions adopted the previous year have been implemented; and to ensure, by means of coordination with the Secretariat, that all the necessary documentation will be ready on time.

25. Lastly, Cuba believes that one of the most serious problems relating to the work of the General Assembly as a whole, including the First Committee, is the lack of appropriate machinery for following up on the implementation of the resolutions and decisions adopted.

26. In the First Committee, as in many other committees, many resolutions are not implemented and there is not even a frank and transparent exchange of views among Member States on the reasons for that state of affairs. This has a direct negative impact on the credibility of the General Assembly as a whole.

27. Cuba therefore believes that at each General Assembly session the First Committee should set aside time for an active exchange among delegations on progress made in the implementation of the resolutions and decisions adopted at the previous session.

28. Cuba will continue to make an active contribution, with its views and proposals, to the ongoing discussion of United Nations reform, including consideration of the First Committee's methods of work.

29. Cuba is in favour of improving as much as possible the methods of work of all United Nations bodies, including the First Committee, provided that that process is not to the detriment of the right of all Member States to promote and defend their legitimate interests and that it does not have a negative impact on the key role played by the General Assembly within the United Nations but, rather, strengthens that role.

D. Mexico

[Original: Spanish]
[30 June 2004]

1. The subject of the reform of the United Nations has acquired great prominence in recent years, with a general sense of the need to strengthen multilateralism as the most appropriate means of addressing the challenges facing the international community as a whole. In his address in the general debate, President Vicente Fox voiced the full support of Mexico for the reform efforts to address both the new challenges and unfinished business.

2. Mexico also supports the exercise of revitalizing the General Assembly which is currently being overseen by its President on the basis of resolution 58/126 which includes an appeal to the Committees to review their methods of work, and therefore to apply resolution 58/41 on improving the effectiveness of the methods of work of the First Committee.

3. As a subsidiary body of the General Assembly, the First Committee in accordance with Articles 11, paragraph 1, and 13, paragraph 1 (a) of the Charter "may consider the general principles of cooperation in the maintenance of international peace and security, including the principles governing disarmament and the regulation of armaments [...]", as well as initiating studies and making recommendations for "promoting international cooperation in the political field and encouraging the progressive development of international law and its codification". Those provisions underline the importance of the mandate of the First Committee on "disarmament and international security" as well as the high expectations of the

international community with respect to the substantive contribution of that body in those areas.

4. In this framework, the efforts to review the methods of work of the First Committee must be regarded as a first stage in a "comprehensive" process which includes all the international disarmament machinery established by the first special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament, particularly in the light of the new international context.

5. That process must be attended by a greater political commitment to the achievement of concrete progress in the agenda for international disarmament and security. In that context, it is highly important to bear in mind the initiative of convening a fourth special session of the United Nations General Assembly devoted to disarmament,[1] as well as the proposal to convene a United Nations conference to identify ways of eliminating nuclear dangers in the context of nuclear disarmament.

6. The reform of the work of the First Committee must take into account the earlier review efforts, both in order to ensure the continuity of action that has enabled it to make progress and to take cognizance of and overcome the obstacles it is currently facing.

7. With regard to more specific aspects of this matter, Mexico supports:

- The right of every country to adopt a position on matters of interest to it, without excluding the possible identification and discussion of a subject or topic of particular importance.
- The holding of interactive discussions, within the limits of the available time and space, provided that does not jeopardize the timetable assigned to the First Committee and does not interfere with the Committee's formal meetings. The pattern of such discussions, in terms of their format and programme, should be consistent with the overall interest of delegations. Consideration should be given to the possibility of inviting specialists.
- The development of an agenda which would include traditional matters related to disarmament, arms control and non-proliferation, and new subjects in those areas. Any grouping or regrouping of the items of the agenda of the First Committee should not necessitate mergers of draft resolutions on the same subject, known as "omnibus resolutions", which dilute the content of the draft resolutions submitted by Member States in accordance with their legitimate interests.
- Encouraging Member States, on a voluntary basis, to biennialize or triennialize the submission of their draft resolutions in order to avoid any mechanical consideration of them, but without any implied classification of them as secondary or of lesser importance.
- With regard to the question of the periodic consideration of the extent of compliance with resolutions adopted by the Committee and the consideration of additional measures to ensure that they are implemented, it is necessary to point out the need to define the purpose of such consideration, as well as the

[1] The question of the objectives and agenda of a fourth extraordinary session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament was considered in the framework of the United Nations Disarmament Commission and incorporated in its reports for 1999.

related machinery and criteria, bearing in mind that, currently, at each session of the General Assembly, the First Committee, through its own resolutions, largely considers the progress made on the issue being addressed.

- Promoting the institutionalization of the participation of civil society in the work of the First Committee in order to acknowledge and encourage its contributions, also exploring the possibility of formalizing a scheme for the participation of non-governmental organizations, similar to that of the Third Committee (social and humanitarian matters).

E. New Zealand

[Original: English]
[29 June 2004]

New Zealand would like to offer the following suggestions for First Committee reform in response to that request.

- Consideration should be given to shortening the time allotted to the Committee. New Zealand considers that four weeks should be sufficient time to enable the Committee to complete its work. The Committee could consider utilizing both morning and afternoon sessions. Even if that is not feasible, the following reforms, together with good time-keeping, should enable the time currently allotted to the Committee to be reduced.

- New Zealand supports shortening the time allowed for general debate from two weeks to one, to allow more time for specific debate.

- New Zealand would like to see greater incorporation of external expertise into the Committee's deliberations. In this context, New Zealand would support Ambassador Sareva of Finland's proposal of interactive debate sessions, incorporating leading experts from academia and civil society. These discussions, which New Zealand agrees would appropriately span over two to three days, could address current key issues, providing focus and context for the Committee's work.

- Debate should be conducted on the basis of a rolling speakers' list. Once the speakers' list for each topic has been exhausted, debate should roll over into the next topic, making maximum use of the time available.

- An enforced time limit should be considered for all statements. If countries are aligned with a regional or group statement, national statements should be shortened or forsaken accordingly.

- Delegations should be encouraged to re-examine the value of long-standing resolutions with an eye to the merit of recycling texts with little or no alteration from year to year. If countries feel that such resolutions contain key positions which are still relevant, they should consider submitting the resolutions on a biennial or triennial basis.

F. Norway

[Original: English]
[30 June 2004]

1. Norway attaches great importance to General Assembly resolution 58/41 on improving the effectiveness of the methods of work of the First Committee. Prior to the fifty-eighth session of the General Assembly, Norway circulated a non-paper suggesting concrete steps to be taken in order to enhance the relevance of the First Committee.

2. Norway organized an informal workshop in Oslo on 8 and 9 December 2003 to explore ways to revitalize the First Committee and make it more relevant. The workshop was intended to be a constructive contribution to the debate on strengthening the General Assembly. The workshop also provided an opportunity for informal exchanges of views on the situation in the Conference on Disarmament as well as the United Nations Disarmament Commission. There were participants from 19 countries from all regions, including the Chairman of the First Committee of the fifty-eighth session of the General Assembly, Ambassador Jarmo Sareva.

3. The discussions at the informal Oslo workshop were open and constructive. While the participants had different perspectives on a number of issues, they all expressed a strong commitment to multilateralism and the need to further improve the functioning of the First Committee.

4. The convener of the workshop observed a convergence of views among the participants that there must be a balance between existing and new challenges to global security in the agenda of the First Committee. Reforms must serve the purpose of strengthening global security. They are not ends in themselves. The reform process must be open and transparent and conducted in a constructive and inclusive manner. It was felt that one should proceed in a gradual, realistic and pragmatic way. One should therefore make a distinction between procedural and substantive changes.

5. Certain possible procedural changes were identified, such as learning from other best practices of the United Nations system, a rolling speakers' list for the general debate in the First Committee, a shorter and more focused general debate, early selection of the Chair and Bureau of the First Committee, consideration of a "troika system", thematic clustering of the agenda of the First Committee, biannualization and triannualization of resolutions on a voluntary basis and more consultations, with a view to merging resolutions that concern the same topic.

6. At the same time, it was felt that more discussion was needed on questions such as the duration of the First Committee: how much effort should be put into reaching consensus resolutions; whether certain issues be accorded priority; the role of the United Nations Secretariat in the follow-up of the resolutions; the role of the civil society in the deliberations of the First Committee; and the need for interactive debates and the need for sunset provisions.

7. The Norwegian conveners produced summaries from the Oslo workshop, which have been circulated in New York and in Geneva. These summaries reflect only the conveners' observations and should not be regarded as negotiated documents.

8. Norway has taken an active part in the informal deliberations in New York and Geneva chaired by Ambassador Sareva. Norway has on these occasions expressed support for Ambassador Sareva's non-paper on measures to improve the First Committee's working methods.

9. Norway supports the adoption of the recommendations contained in Ambassador Sareva's non-paper. At the same time, Norway underlines that improving the functioning of the First Committee must be an ongoing process. At the fifty-ninth session of the General Assembly, the First Committee should therefore devote time for further consultations on ways and means to make the Committee more relevant to better meet existing and new security challenges. Improvements of the functioning of the First Committee should be seen as a contribution to the overall efforts to revitalize the General Assembly. At the same time, a more relevant First Committee should have a positive spin-off for multilateral disarmament mechanisms, such as the Conference on Disarmament, the United Nations Disarmament Commission and the various multilateral treaties.

10. While supporting Ambassador Sareva's proposals, Norway reiterates its position on the following matters:

- The general debate in the First Committee should be more focused and function as a true "higher-level" segment. There should be limited speaking time and member countries should, when necessary, be asked to circulate a longer written version of their statements. The Secretary-General or the Under-Secretary-General for Disarmament Affairs should introduce the main topics at each session of the Committee. His introduction should be circulated in advance so that delegates are better prepared for the discussion.

- The format of the thematic debates should be improved. Member countries should be encouraged to circulate thematic discussion papers as a basis for interactive discussions. Another option is to task the United Nations Disarmament Commission to prepare thematic papers. Relevant disarmament experts from civil society and academia could also be invited to make introductions and take part in the thematic deliberations. Non-governmental organizations should also be allowed to participate in these discussions.

- The number of resolutions considered by the First Committee should be reduced. In this respect, Norway favours more use of biennial and triennial submissions of resolutions. There should also be more consultations among member countries to merge resolutions that cover the same topic.

- Norway also favours more use of the instruments of decisions instead of resolutions. Administrative resolutions taken by the Committee could be clustered into one general set of conclusions.

- Norway favours an overhaul of the agenda of the First Committee to better reflect the thematic content of the Committee. The agenda should cover both existing and new security threats.

- Norway welcomes the decision to select the Bureau of the First Committee three months in advance of the session. This will allow for better preparation. At the same time one should consider additional steps for improved continuity, for instance by making one of the Vice-Presidents according to geographic rotation the President in the following Bureau.

G. Sierra Leone

[Original: English]
[30 June 2004]

1. In its resolution 58/41, the General Assembly noted that the improvement of the methods of work of the First Committee would complement and facilitate the broader effort to revitalize the General Assembly. While sharing that view, Sierra Leone believes that the ongoing process of implementing resolution 58/126 on the revitalization of the General Assembly has provided some viable recommendations which the First Committee should seriously consider in its effort to improve its methods of work. These recommendations are consistent with elements contained in the non-paper that the Sierra Leone delegation circulated in the First Committee during the fifty-eighth session of the General Assembly.

2. Sierra Leone is of the view that the Committee should, first and foremost, focus attention on those measures (a) that would not require changes in the rules of procedure and (b) that could be implemented without reference to the General Assembly in the form of draft resolutions to that effect. These measures could be summarized as follows:

Time management

3. The programme of work and timetable of each session of the Committee should be adjusted to ensure more efficient time management. This matter is within the purview of the Committee and its Bureau and need not require action or approval by the General Assembly. Specifically, the objective is to ensure that more time is allocated to in-depth thematic and interactive discussions on all aspects of disarmament and international security on the Committee's agenda.

4. It has been suggested, for instance, that all Main Committees could adopt or expand, as appropriate, interactive debates and panels, so as to enhance discussions and bring together experts from various fields.

5. For its part, the First Committee should make greater use of the expertise and resources of relevant non-governmental institutions and organizations that have made and continue to make invaluable contributions in the field of disarmament and non-proliferation. Informal sessions of the Committee could be convened for this purpose. In other words, the Committee could devote a limited number of sessions at the end of the general debate and before the formal thematic discussions and introduction of draft resolutions. Other participants in the informal sessions could include representatives of intergovernmental disarmament machinery and regional disarmament centres. The idea of "question time" could be introduced in this segment of the Committee's work.

6. Another objective of time management is to give delegations (sponsors, co-sponsors and potential co-sponsors) a better opportunity to hold informal consultations on the respective draft resolutions. The practice of scheduling such consultations during the lunch hour is not in the interest of delegations, especially those whose permanent missions are at a distance from the United Nations premises.

7. Sierra Leone offers the following suggested programme of work and timetable:

Meeting for the organization of work	1 meeting
General debate on all disarmament items	8 meetings
Dedicated informal consultations on draft resolutions	2 days
Informal interactive discussions with disarmament and non-proliferation experts, and/or non-governmental organizations, and representatives of regional disarmament centres	2 meetings
Thematic discussions on items, as well as introduction and consideration of draft resolutions under various clusters on all disarmament and international security issues	9 meetings
Action on all draft resolutions	8 meetings

Length of resolutions

8. The issue of excessive length of many resolutions, not only of the First Committee but also of other Main Committees, is not new. Improving the effectiveness of the methods of work of the First Committee also requires immediate action to reduce the length of many of its resolutions. Sierra Leone wholeheartedly endorses the suggestion that resolutions and decisions should be more concise, focused and action-oriented, with preambular paragraphs kept to the minimum.

Reporting

9. The practice of requesting the Secretary-General to prepare reports on the views of Member States on issues on the Committee's agenda should be reviewed. The Committee can recommend the inclusion in the provisional agenda of subsequent sessions specific items without a parallel request for the Secretary-General to produce a new report on those items.

10. In this regard, Sierra Leone suggests that starting with the fifty-ninth session, the Committee should, on the basis of "best practices", inform the General Assembly on action and initiatives it has taken to improve the effectiveness of its methods of work. In other words, after discussing the views of Member States contained in the forthcoming report of the Secretary-General in accordance with paragraph 1 of resolution 58/41, the Committee should merely recommend, in a short and precise draft resolution, that the Assembly take note of the measures that the Committee has taken in improving the effectiveness of its methods of work. It is assumed that similar drafts would emanate from the other Main Committees.

11. Closely linked with the current reporting practice is the issue of having the Committee consider some items on a biennial or triennial basis. Sierra Leone is of the view that, although the issue has political repercussions for many Member States, States should be encouraged to continue consultations on the criteria of

guidelines to be used in deciding on the agenda items that should be considered on a biennial or triennial basis.

H. Switzerland

[Original: French]
[30 June 2004]

1. Switzerland feels that there is a need to improve the effectiveness of the working methods of the First Committee. The primary aim of efforts towards that end should be to strengthen the role of the General Assembly with respect to disarmament and international security, as well as its capacity to respond more effectively to the current challenges in that area.

2. The proposals designed to improve the working methods of the First Committee should be placed in the current context of efforts to revitalize the General Assembly in accordance with resolution 58/126, irrespective of whether the proposals concern procedures, organization or the content of work.

3. The schedules of work of the various multilateral bodies concerned with disarmament, namely the Disarmament Commission, the Conference on Disarmament and the First Committee of the United Nations General Assembly, must be coordinated in order to enhance complementarity and synergies between those bodies.

4. Switzerland considers that the First Committee must achieve greater political visibility and play more effectively its role as a forum for interactive dialogue on all disarmament issues. Possible measures in that area might be:

- Reducing the duration of the general debate to a maximum of two or three days;
- If possible, reducing the duration of the session of the Committee;
- Stronger focus in the substantive debates on priority themes;
- Introduction of question-and-answer sessions involving consultation with experts, varying depending on the subject matter.

5. Switzerland would also like to see an improvement in the opportunities for verifying the implementation of the decisions of the First Committee. Possible measures in that area might be:

- The election of future Chairmen and Bureaux at the end of the main session;
- Institutionalized collaboration between the elected and outgoing Chairmen and Bureaux;
- The organization of informal meetings of the co-authors of resolutions;
- The introduction of an agenda item entitled "Follow-up of First Committee resolutions".

6. Finally, Switzerland considers that the agenda should focus more closely on the most important subjects and that the number of reports should be reduced. Switzerland is in favour of the idea of the biennialization or triennialization of the subjects on the agenda and a merging of resolutions wherever possible (to be studied

on a case-by-case basis). Furthermore, it might be advisable for the Bureau, or even an "ad hoc working group", independently of the debate on the reform of the First Committee, to make proposals on the refocusing of the timetable.

I. European Union

[Original: English]
[25 June 2004]

1. The European Union welcomes the efforts to make the work of the First Committee more relevant and to make the most effective use of the time allotted. The European Union believes that the rationalization of the working methods of the First Committee would be of benefit to all members and, in this context, would like to express its broad agreement with the thrust of some of the practical steps to improve the work of the Committee outlined at the fifty-eighth session in the Chairman's non-paper, entitled "Measures to improve First Committee working methods". Having considered the measures contained in the non-paper, the European Union would like to make the following comments.

General debate

2. The European Union agrees with the view that the general debate should be shortened to one week. The general debate should be geared towards analysing the international situation in the field of disarmament and non-proliferation, and should preferably not be a mere summary of national standpoints or national actions on the subjects which will be dealt with in the thematic debates. The European Union would like to suggest the limiting of speaking time and making greater use of the possibility to distribute the long versions of national statements as a means of achieving this goal, while not detracting from the substance of the general debate. Establishing the practice of a rolling list of statements would contribute to the goal of a more intensive general debate, while making best use of the time available.

New formats for discussion in the Committee

3. The European Union is in favour of increasing the interactivity of discussions. The inclusion of leading experts from academia and civil society may also benefit some discussions.

Thematic part

4. The Chairman's proposal to establish a list of rolling speakers is in line with the thinking of the European Union.

Agenda items

5. The European Union agrees with the Chairman on the issue of overhauling the agenda to reflect the thematic content of the work of the First Committee. The Chairman proposes reducing the agenda to ten cluster items which would be identical to the current thematic clusters. The European Union is convinced of the need to maintain, in the First Committee, a balanced agenda that reflects important goals and objectives and that is able to react to and focus upon today's most immediate problems. Such problems include the non-proliferation and disarmament

challenges facing the international treaties today, as well as the question of terrorism and weapons of mass destruction.

Resolutions

6. The European Union favours the greater use of the biennial and triennial submission of resolutions, so as to reduce their number. The European Union is in favour of reconsidering the automatic inclusion of a paragraph at the end of resolutions asking for the re-inscription of the item on the agenda. The European Union also favours the more frequent use of decisions instead of resolutions. Decisions are easier to handled and less time-consuming. Limiting the reporting requirements so as to also reduce the workload of the Secretariat should also be explored. The elimination from the agenda of resolutions which do not have as their main focus the mandate of the First Committee would be desirable.

Chair and Bureau

7. The European Union welcomes the fact that the Chairs and Bureaux of the Main Committees, including the First Committee, will in future be elected three months in advance of the General Assembly session. However, the European Union would continue to favour exploring ways of having the Chair and Bureau of the Committee in place even earlier, so as to allow the opportunity for more thorough preparation of the work of the Committee, in consultation with the regional groups.

Fifty-ninth session of the General Assembly

Finally, the European Union is of the opinion that concrete recommendations in respect of improving the working methods of the First Committee should be made at the fifty-ninth session of the General Assembly.